

*seven
roads
to*



THE 7 CAPITAL SINS
EACH A
DIFFERENT
ROAD

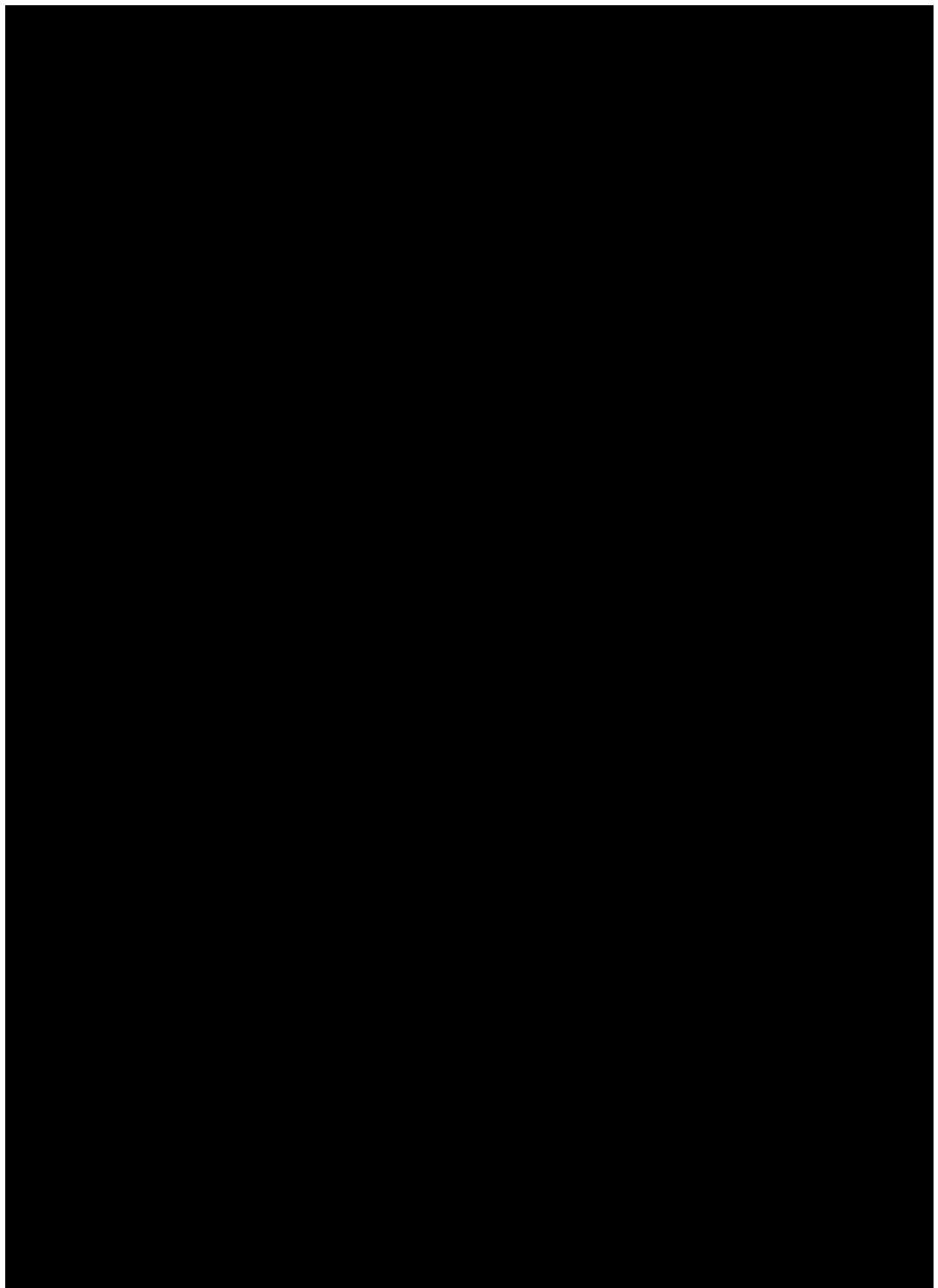


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Introduction

One of the gifts of the Holy Ghost that we receive in Confirmation is *fear of the Lord*. Unfortunately, it's one of the least cultivated, the least known of all of the gifts of the Spirit and yet one of the most necessary for salvation. For fear of the Lord is nothing else than the recognition of the holiness of God.

The saint does not fear God because God can send him to hell. A saint in sin - if we dare use such an example - would prefer the desolation of hell rather than intrude his barren, sin-bearing soul on the all-holy presence of the Divine Majesty. But that's because he knows God - and only one who knows God can sense the outrage against Him that sin is.

In the life of Father Damien, the unforgettable hero of the Molokai lepers, the story is told of how he realized one day that he too had been set aside for death and banishment by the disease. While shaving one morning, he dropped a kettle of scalding water on his bare foot. The seared flesh felt no pain - but Father Damien's soul must have been filled with anguish when he realized that this was an unmistakable sign that he had contracted leprosy.

There is a parallel to this story in the world today; but we, unlike Father Damien, too often take the lack of pain to be a sign of health rather than of illness.



Our sins should sear our souls with shame, remorse, sorrow. If they did - if we were in anguish at the realization of the affront to God's sanctity our sins present - there would yet be hope for us. We would be sick perhaps, but with a chance for recovery. Once, however, we have contracted this leprosy of the soul - the loss of the sense of sin so that we no longer even understand what sin is in the eyes of God - it takes an extraordinary miracle of God's grace to touch our souls and cure us.

What is sin? What is the malice of sin? Only one who knows God can understand because mortal sin is an attempt to destroy God or to make Him less than He is. But sin is a fact of life for all of us. Temptation, sin, the need for penance and mortification are woven into the very fabric of our lives. That's one of the reasons why each year the Church sets aside the 40 days of Lent as a long retreat - so that by fasting, prayer and good works, we can strip off the layers of sin-crust from our souls and repeat our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil with the innocence and fervor of a new beginning.

No one goes to hell by committing sin in the abstract, sin in general. Our character traits, talents and dispositions, our experiences - everything about us points out to us a particular road to hell - one of the seven that are called the capital sins. For us, this or that particular one is the fastest and easiest because of who we are, what we are, where we find ourselves. And the road sign will read either pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy or sloth.

The seven capital sins are called capital because they are the sins of primary importance and inevitably spawn a whole litter of Other sins. Pride leads to boasting, ostentation, hypocrisy; envy is followed by hatred, discord, a restless quest for riches and honors, and constant turmoil of soul.

The slothful man is idle, aimless, neglects his spiritual duties and the obligations of his state in life. And so on for the other capital sins. They all lead to other sins. They're all roads to hell. Most important, we must find out whether we're traveling one of these roads.

Anger

- by Father Albert J Shamon

When Henry II of England saw the city of his birth seething in flames and was forced to flee from his enemies, he cried out in anger: "The city I have loved best on earth, the city where I was born and bred - this, O God, to the increase of my shame. Thou has reft from me. I will requite as best I can. I will assuredly rob Thee of the thing Thou prizest most in me, my soul." This

blasphemy, this unreasonable threat of self-damnation, had but one cause: anger.



Anger can make man do such unmanly things. To vent his anger, Montresor, in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*, went so far as to bury alive his enemy, Fortunato, because of "the thousand injuries" Fortunato had heaped upon him. *Anger*, wrote Saint Thomas, *is the vehement desire to strike back*.

It is significant that Saint Thomas did not say anger is the desire "to get even"; but rather, the desire "to strike back." Anger, consequently, need not always be evil; in fact, it may at times be splendid.

If a mother, for instance, did not strike back the child that strikes her, the mother's love would indeed be something weak and vicious - unworthy of a mother. If Christ had not defended His Father's house and, in divine anger, driven out

the money-changers. He would not have had the virtue of zeal. "Be angry and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

But anger like that of Henry II and Montresor is as ugly as all sin. It is the anger of the clenched fist; the anger that strikes back not to correct or to defend what is loved, but to offend and to hurt what is hated. The red anger that brings the rush of blood to the face and fire to the eyes; the white anger that drives the blood down deep and blanches the countenance; the anger that has no reason in it but only revenge; the anger that lasts beyond a minute; that lets the sun go down upon it; that nurses its wrath to keep it warm; that seeks, like the poison-swelled snake, to sting wherever and whenever it can; the anger that meditates and contemplates, plans and plots, glows and gloats on how to get even, to give punch for punch, eye for eye, and lie for lie - that is the anger which is branded a capital sin.

That was the anger which Christ equated with murder when He proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Thou shalt not kill'; and whoever shall kill shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). The same sentence (judgment) for both crimes; if the punishments be the same, then are not the crimes?

Of course, anger does not seem that bad. The fact that anger can act in the name of justice gives it an air of respectability. Usually an angry person thinks he is giving another only what he deserves. But consider what anger does; judge it by its fruits.

Anger generates hatred; hatred begets quarrels; quarrels, name-calling, blasphemy and blows. Anger, in a word, is the enemy of peace. They cannot coexist. The anger that strikes

back in revenge is always detestable; it is never justified - never!

First of all, one has no right to get angry. No mere man can read another's heart. (In fact, man can hardly read his own heart.) Yet, unless one can read the human heart, he cannot know for certain whether or not an injury has been inflicted. For an "injury" is not an injury unless it comes from the heart: no evil intended, no evil done. On the contrary, were one able to know all the circumstances entering into a human act, far from condemning, such a one would only praise. To know all is to forgive all.

Had we been on Calvary on the first Good Friday and seen the milling mobs, bellowing against the Son of God, we would have pontifically pronounced, "Guilty." But He, Who alone could read their hearts, cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That is why God said to leave judgment to Him. "Revenge is mine," says the Lord, "I will repay." He alone knows the human heart.

Sin, because it offends God, creates an infinite debt for the sinner; an injury, because it offends only man, creates merely a finite debt for the offender. God, like the monarch of the parable, forgives each sinner upon his mere contrite confession; He demands that we, unlike the merciless servant, emulate His largess. A person may not be able to fast, to pray long hours, or to endure martyrdom, but who cannot forgive? This one thing God demands of all!

A Chinese Emperor once said to his war lords, "After I have conquered this country, I will destroy all my enemies."

He conquered; but there was no slaughter of enemy leaders. To the astonishment of the Emperor's friends, the enemy were banqueted at the Emperor's own table.

Puzzled, the war lords remonstrated, "Did you not say you would destroy your enemies?"

"I have," answered the Emperor. "I have forgiven them all and have made them my friends."

That was the method in Christ's apparently mad meekness. He wants us to change the world - not by striking back, but by forgiving. Of all the virtues, Christ singled out especially two: "Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart." Humility is the vertical virtue: it regulates man's relations with his God; meekness is the horizontal virtue: it regulates man's relations with his fellow man. Humility looks up to God; meekness looks across to neighbor. Humility lays the foundation for one's own salvation; but meekness, for his neighbor's salvation.

The modern world hates humility, because it confuses it with servility. It despises meekness, because it mistakes it for weakness. The world says, "Strike back; not to is cowardice." The meek Christ says, "Do not strike back; for that is strength." The world is all-wrong; Christ is all-right.

Not to be angry with those who hate and injure us is not easy - but it is Christian. "I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Covetousness

- by Father Joseph F Beckman

A priest was once called to the deathbed of a rich merchant who had been away from the Church for many years. Speaking bluntly, but kindly, of the man's serious spiritual state the priest began to take hope when the patient looked longingly at a beautiful silver crucifix held before him.

The hope was short-lived, however; the dying man whispered, "What do you think the cross is worth?"



This little story illustrates better than we might imagine the effects of the capital sin covetousness or avarice.

Saint Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy says, "Covetousness is the root of all evils, and some in their eagerness to get rich have strayed from the faith and have involved themselves in many troubles" (I Timothy 6:10).

The story is famous of Abraham Lincoln walking along a street in Springfield, Illinois, one day with two of his young sons, who were both crying.

"What seems to be the trouble with the boys, Mr. Lincoln?" a passer-by asked.

"Same thing that's wrong with the rest of the world," Lincoln said; "I've got three walnuts and each boy wants two."

Covetousness always has been, is and always will be one of man's serious problems in this world, for covetousness is one of the capital sins, one of the basic evil tendencies to which our fallen nature is prone.

Covetousness, or avarice, is a disordered love of earthly goods, usually of money. It is natural for man to desire earthly goods. He needs them, in moderation, to exist.

But our love of temporal goods becomes disordered if it is not guided by a reasonable end. If we love money for itself, as an end in itself rather than as a means to normal living, we are guilty of avarice. Occasionally we read of a beggar or rag-picker or someone else living in extreme destitution. Then after he dies, he is discovered to have a horde of money hidden away somewhere. Certainly, this is the sign of a mind sick with avarice if not with a real mental illness.

Our disordered love of riches may lie in the manner in which we seek them. If we are so eager to acquire possessions that we use dishonest means to attain them we are guilty of covetousness. If we neglect our duties, harm our health or injure the health or rights of others, we are guilty of covetousness.

Our disordered love may lie in an unwillingness to use properly the goods we now have. Perhaps we seldom or never give alms to someone poorer than we. In some families the wife and children go in need, or they get what they need only after a humiliating battle. Or perhaps the husband is so devoted to work that he seldom if ever spends any time with his family. A disordered love of money may be at the root of such an evil.

Covetousness is not generally a vice of the young. Many times the victim of avarice is an old maid or a bachelor who,

without dependents, fears for the future.

"Do not be anxious," Our Lord advises. "Look at the birds of the air. . . . See how the lilies of the field grow. . . . Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things [food, clothing] shall be given you besides" (Matthew 6).

Covetousness is a serious evil for many reasons. It is sinful in itself and often leads to many other sins: theft, fraud, lying, uncharitableness, broken contracts and perjury.

Covetousness is a serious obstacle to holiness. "He who seeks after riches," Saint Philip Neri used to say, "will never become a saint." The heart that is overcrowded with worldly desires has little place for God. The person who would prefer, for even a short time, the richest of earthly possessions instead of God's love is foolish indeed.

We must not belittle prudent provision for the future or intelligent thrift, but we must be careful that inordinate love of money does not become a passion with us. We should handle worldly possessions as we will wish we had handled them the day after our death.

"All we can hold in our dead hands," says an ancient Sanskrit proverb, "is what we have given away."

Saint John Chrysostom says, "The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but one who gives much."

Saint Francis de Sales in his *Introduction to the Devout Life* gives excellent advice to the avaricious person. "If you are inclined to avarice," he says, "often think of the foolishness of this sin, which makes us the slaves of what was created only to serve us,

"Reflect that at death we shall have to part with all our possessions, and leave them in the hands of someone who may squander them or to whom they may prove a source of ruin and damnation."

In the words of our Master Himself, from His Sermon on the Mount, "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth, where rust and moth consume, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consumes, nor thieves break in and steal.

"For where thy treasure is, there thy heart also will be" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Envy

- by Monsignor Hubert A Maino

The sin of envy has a history that goes back beyond the time of Adam. The fall of Satan and his fellow devils stemmed from their envy of the Almighty. The same vice prompted the sin of our first parents. Satan made them envious of the excellence of God. Envy caused the first murder; Cain's jealousy of Abel flamed out when God preferred the sacrifice of his brother.



But we need not dig into ancient lore to find case histories of envy. Unfortunately it's just as prevalent today. Envious rivalries among nations have been contributory causes of wars. Commercial and industrial strife are traceable to the same source. Pope Leo XIII saw in the envy of the poor for the rich one of the sources of the social unrest of modern times.

Every pastor and marriage counselor knows how many marriages founder on the shoals of jealousy.

Envy is defined by moral theologians as "sorrow at another's welfare." Akin to it is jealousy, which envisions a neighbor's good as diminishing one's own. The envious man sees himself as the inferior. He is depressed by the real or fancied superiority of another. The jealous man, however, is aware of his own advantage, but is fearful that a rival may equal or surpass him.

It is, of course, obvious that envy is a direct violation of charity. The fundamental Christian law bids us love our neighbor as ourself. "Charity envies not." If we sincerely love our neighbor, we rejoice in his welfare or success.

Envy is one of the seven capital sins. That means that it is not only one of the worst of human failings but the source of many other sins. Envy gives rise to quarreling, hatred, malicious gossip, slander and rash judgment. It promotes greed, ostentation and dishonesty in business.

Sacred Scripture warns solemnly against envy. "Soundness of heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). "Envy and anger shorten a man's days" (Ecclus. 30:26). Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians (5:21) names envy among those works of the flesh which close the kingdom of heaven to mankind.

Remedies against envy must begin almost in the cradle. Since this vice is but one facet of pride, the excessive self-love we all inherit from Adam, parents will automatically stifle envy if they succeed in cultivating in their offspring a measure of Christian humility. For that is the virtue that regulates self-love and makes possible the genuine, disinterested, altruistic sentiment which is love of neighbor.

But nowadays who wants to be "humble"? What parent is happy to have a "humble" child? The trouble is that the beautiful Christian virtue of humility has had a "bad press." In current journalistic jargon, humility presents an unfavorable "image" to the public. For many of us, our mental picture of humility is Uriah Keep, the human doormat, whose abject self-depreciation was phony and contemptible.

Actually humility strikes an even balance between self-love and altruism. The humble man does not hate himself. Again to use current jargon, he "accepts" himself. He acknowledges the good qualities he possesses, but he credits them to God, their source. And in the spirit of the true Christian, he esteems and is willing to serve the Divine Image as reflected in every fellow human being.

It is not easy even with the help of grace either to achieve this ideal of spiritual maturity in oneself or to impart it to another. But parents have the obligation to do both.

In family life the first appearance of envy often occurs when a second or subsequent baby is born. The green-eyed monster then shows itself in the reaction of the slightly older child. Displaced as the sole object of attention, Johnny or Mary hotly resents the intruding newcomer. Wise parents, of course, are careful to include the older child in displays of affection. They should also encourage Johnny or Mary to perform little services for the newcomer, and thus nurture positive expressions of concern, service and responsibility.

In situations provocative of envy, the Christian will draw upon his spiritual resources of trust in God and conformity to His will. When someone else gets the job you thought you deserved, think of that phrase of the Our Father that you repeat every day, "Thy will be done."

Reflect that God's wisdom is infinite - that He has His reasons for humiliating you and elevating your rivals. If through some such episode you grow in humility and in resignation to the will of God, you will have gained supernatural, eternal profit that far outweighs the temporal sorrow.

There is one sure way to draw spiritual benefit from the contemplation of our neighbor's success, especially if it be in the realm of the spirit. That is to make our neighbor's achievement spur our own ambition. "What others have done I can do," was Saint Augustine's motto on the eve of his conversion. Many a generous young man and many an excellent young woman have made the choice of a religious vocation because some admired relative or friend had led the way by his example.

In wartime courageous young men deliberately choose to be marines, paratroopers or pilots. Why? Because it's hard, because they want to match their abilities against the highest challenge.

Here, then, is the true remedy for envy. It is to realize that spiritual combat calls for similar noble emulation. Whether one's vocation be among the clergy, in the cloister, or in the world, be happy to hide in the obscurity of Christ's army. Trust God to award to each of us the exact measure of reward or punishment we have merited. Remember that "much good can be done if we are not too anxious who gets the credit."

Gluttony

- by Father Frank Calkins, O.S.M.

The sin of gluttony is the excessive desire of eating and drinking. The key word in that definition is the word "excessive," because the simple desire to eat and drink is not evil. This desire was implanted in man by God for the protection of life. He associated pleasure with eating so that man would be drawn to nourish his body and maintain his health.



The infant, for example, instinctively takes nourishment to build up the tiny flame of life which has just begun, and the grown man is prompted by the pangs of hunger to eat and thus repair the loss of vital energy which each day brings. Just as the sex urge protects the life and vigor of the human race, so the desire for food and drink insures the life and vigor of the individual human being. There is nothing evil, therefore, in this desire, nor is it gluttony to enjoy the pleasure attached to eating and drinking. The evil begins when this desire is indulged excessively or unreasonably.

Now when does a person act contrary to right reason in this matter and consequently commit the sin of gluttony? A fine moralist of ancient times, Saint Gregory, answered that question with this succinct sentence, "We commit gluttony when we eat hastily, sumptuously, too much, greedily, daintily." Let us scrutinize each word.

Hastily - the meaning here is not too fast, but rather eating between times - not waiting for mealtime without good reason. A person would be guilty of gluttony on this score if he ate when it was not necessary, or when he was not hungry or in need of nourishment. The almost universal fourth daily meal in our country, the so-called "midnight snack," sometimes and for some people might be considered as an unnecessary repast and a slight sin of gluttony.

Eating sumptuously. Sumptuous or expensive eating is the eating of costly and rare food. The Gospel tells a story about a certain rich man called Dives, who was guilty of this sin. It does not say that he was a wicked man, or an unjust or impure man, but only that he was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and feasted sumptuously every day."

Eating too much. This manner of committing the sin of gluttony is the most common. In fact the word gluttony is almost exclusively understood to mean this and nothing more. Eating greedily means eating ravenously, like a mere animal.

Lastly, *eating daintily* signifies a certain squeamishness about the preparation of food and the precise flavoring of it. Aren't we reminded here of the almost fanatical care with which we answer the query of the waitress, "How would you like your steak done. Sir?"

Now, in all these forms of gluttony we find something inordinate, or contrary to right reason. Sound reasoning demands that food be taken for the necessities and convenience of nature. But in these instances given above it is taken principally for pleasure. Actually the man who eats too much, or the gourmet who dines luxuriously every day, is not nourishing himself in order to preserve his health and sustain life; he is really undermining his health and

shortening his life. There is a perversion here. He is living to eat, rather than eating to live. To eat for the sake of eating is a sin because eating is a means to an end. Instead of using it as a means, the glutton makes it an end in itself.

Whenever a creature distorts the plan or purpose of nature (which is another way of saying God) there is always a sin.

It is not easy to determine when gluttony is a mortal sin and when it is not. Saint Thomas says that if a man were so attached to the pleasures of eating that he would be willing to disobey God's commandments in order to obtain that pleasure then gluttony would be a grave sin. If, on the other hand, he were to have an inordinate desire for the pleasures of the palate, yet would not for their sake do anything contrary to God's law, his gluttony would be a venial sin.

Undoubtedly it would be a mortal sin to eat or drink so heavily each day as to injure one's health seriously. It could be a serious sin likewise to break the laws of fast and abstinence for the sake of satisfying one's appetite, or to willingly and knowingly drink to the point of losing the use of reason. Ordinarily, however, a slight excess at the table, a mild pampering of the appetite would not seem to constitute more than a venial sin. Saint Augustine calls it one of "the lesser sins" when a man takes more meat or drink than is necessary.

There is one great remedy against gluttony, and that is the remembrance of the example of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. If we study His life we see everywhere the lesson of temperance.

He began His life in a manger. The first sermon He preached was a plea for a detachment from luxuries, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." His public life was initiated by a fast of 40 days and 40 nights. He

traveled about Palestine like a beggar without a home. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head." There was no luxury in the way He dined, for we read of Him eating only the plainest of food, ears of corn, bread and fish, figs plucked from the trees.

But most of all think of Christ on the Cross, stripped of His garments, tortured in soul and in body, letting fall from His lips the poignant cry, "I thirst." This was His reparation for all the sins of gluttony and drunkenness committed down the ages. Would you commit even one small sin of gluttony to add another pang to that suffering brow?

Lust

- by Monsignor Richard T Doherty

During the year 1958, forcible rape occurred once every 36 minutes in the United States.

This is revealed in the FBI's Law Enforcement Bulletin for January, 1960. "A truly shocking and shameful state of affairs," said J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Shocking as it is, it is not the whole sordid story. Forcible rape is but one of innumerable crimes of injustice and violence which spring from lust.

The power and influence of lust is like a tidal wave sweeping all those under its sway into many other kinds of sin.

That is why it is called a capital sin. That is to say, with Saint Thomas Aquinas (II-II, Q.153, a.4), that "in his desire for it, a man proceeds to commit many sins, all of which are said to arise from lust as from a principal vice."

Over and above the gamut of crimes incurred for its sake, the inordinate desire for sex pleasure endangers the common good. For example, it propagates dread disease. Ultimately its attack is aimed at the basic social unit, the family.

Those who continually seek sinful pleasure in thoughts, words or actions soon find it well nigh impossible to restrain



this appetite. Its demands increase with each satisfaction.

When they discover that they are more or less trapped, they feel that it is impossible to bring their conduct into line with their religious convictions. So they bring their belief into line with their conduct. Hence, loss of faith is frequent among those who are impure. Moreover, they are tempted by the worst of all sins, hatred of God Who forbids and punishes the pleasure to which they have dedicated themselves. Despair is often their lot.

Just as this vice alters man's relations with his God, it likewise disturbs, within himself, the balance of his faculties. The lower appetite is indulged at any cost, even when it's clearly unreasonable.

This imbalance modifies, in turn, his ability to communicate normally with other human beings. The soaring rate of forcible rape, already mentioned, is but one indication of this. Even if the lustful person is not criminally unjust and cruel, his relationships are impaired none the less. Sometimes he is unfit for normal marital relations.

The fact that mental disease is our number-one health problem dovetails with the now half-forgotten Kinsey reports. This is the heart of the matter. Lust is but a desire for sex pleasure contrary to right reason.

Our age has developed a rational attitude toward food. Self-control in this area goes by the name of dieting. One who improves his appearance and health by scientific regulation of both the quality and the quantity of his food receives the plaudits of others. All social pressures favor such intelligent procedure today.

The ancient Roman, however, did not see it that way. At his sumptuous banquets he could observe all the amenities of

polite society in going to the vomitorium. He was not ashamed that others knew what he was about. It was the thing to do.

Now, in retrospect, everyone instinctively feels that this was a revolting frustration of nature. Obviously the pleasure of eating is not an end in itself. It should conduce to the health and maintenance of the body.

Ironically, however, many who would condemn the ancient Roman have an attitude toward sex pleasure that is very like his attitude toward food.

Sex pleasure is ordained by nature as an inducement to perform an act which has for its purpose the procreation and education of children, duties which cannot be rightly attended to except in the married state. Hence, those who seek this gratification outside of matrimony or who, in matrimony, seek it to the exclusion of the very purpose of the satisfaction, act contrary to reason.

This is likewise true of those thoughts, words, looks, kisses and embraces which are preparatory to and, of their very nature, lead up to the marriage act. To take pleasure in them is lawful for those for whom complete pleasure is lawful.

If this gratification is voluntary or fully consented to, no matter how slight the excitement of the lower appetite, no matter how far from the consummated act, there is always serious injury to a great good, or, at least, the proximate danger of such injury and hence grave sin. A small spark of flame is not trivial if it is in the vicinity of a gasoline tank.

Admittedly it is the most difficult of all the virtues because it seeks to subject to right reason the most unruly of the passions. However, it is not impossible for God never commands that. But He does require us to do what lies in

our power and to pray for the grace of doing that which, of ourselves, we are incapable of doing.

To prayer must be joined frequent reception of the sacraments. The tribunal of Penance, where one makes a frank avowal of faults, sometimes affords better mental hygiene than the psychiatrist's couch. When it comes to restoring balance between reason and desire, the more personal, the more sincere the effort, the better the therapy, to say nothing of the tremendous power of sacramental grace. Even more helpful is the grace of intimate union with Christ in Holy Communion.

However, we should not rely solely on prayer and the sacraments. There is profound wisdom in the counsel of restraint, self-denial, mortification, preached by Christ and the Church. We should take it upon ourselves every day to do some little thing that is disagreeable or unpleasant, so that we may always have mastery over our impulses.

We say "some little thing," because right reason must govern our mortifications as well as our indulgences. If little chastisements prove inadequate, then one should consult his confessor before adopting more arduous ones, such as fasting, wearing penitential cords or chains, to say nothing of inflicting the discipline on oneself or wearing a hair shirt.

In times past, however, even the latter two were widely used among lay people, many of whom are now canonized saints. They are not mentioned by way of recommendation but to point out that "where there is a will there is a way."

The spark of lust can't spread unless it's fed, and it's our job to make sure we don't fall into occasions which lead us into sins of lust and the countless other sins that spring from it.

Pride

- by Father Andrew M Greeley

Pride is often presented to us as a "strong" vice, one that only really great men can attain. The proud man, like the devil in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is thought to be at least a noble man, whatever his other faults might be. Sins motivated by pride are taken to be more dignified than sins springing from other vices, such as lust.

Humility, on the other hand, is understood to be a "weak" virtue - a virtue for pious contemplatives and sweet young ladies. The humble person is one who lets others push him around; humility is essentially something negative - the absence of strong will and strong feelings.

Actually, the opposite holds true: Pride is not the vice of the strong; it is the vice of the blind. The proud man is not the cold-headed realist who has the will power to forge ahead in the world. He is rather a starry-eyed dreamer who plunges blindly toward disaster in a world of fantasy he has fashioned for himself.

The proud man deceives himself, believing that he is the master of his own destiny - that he can do anything he wants and can claim credit for whatever he has done.

The first sin ever committed by any man is a good example of this. Adam knew that all he had was from God; he realized



that if he disobeyed God he ran the risk of losing everything. Yet the dream of making a decision for himself, of being for a few moments at least free from God's control, blinded him to reality and made him an easy victim of the serpent's fantasy that disobedience would make him like God. The proud man sees himself as the center of the universe and God and his fellow humans as mere satellites revolving around him. In fact, the proud man makes himself a god.

We have grown accustomed to think the proud person is one who continually talks about himself or his accomplishments; but this is not the real essence of pride. Such boasting might be the result of the less serious vice of vanity or merely of some kind of emotional insecurity. The proud man is not necessarily given much to talking about himself to others - he really cares little what others think. Only one person's opinion is valuable: his own. If he reveals this opinion to others he does not intend to convince them; he merely wishes to inform them.

That pride is blindness is not always as obvious as in Adam's case. The very nature of his vice makes the proud man blind even to his own pride. He refuses to admit in himself the tendency to pride which haunts all of us. He is misunderstood, persecuted, unappreciated and cheated by hostile forces around him. The world envies his superiority and seeks to destroy it. Pride is a spiritual persecution complex.

The proud man will have no part of active participation in the Church's worship since he sees no reason why a man of his success and accomplishments should have his prayers disturbed by those who are not strong enough to stand on their own two feet. He is quick to criticize and to judge others since he knows that they cannot be motivated by ideals as pure as his own - that somewhere along the line

they have compromised with evil or they wouldn't be as successful as they are.

He is harsh with those under his authority because this is the only way to bring them up to the standard he demands. He sees the world as a mixture of black and white - with very little gray. He cannot compromise or adjust himself to others' peculiarities; and, of course, he can never see another person's side of the argument. He may not know whether the other is stupid or in bad faith, but he is certain that his opponent is wrong.

There are degrees of pride and hence degrees of humiliating experiences which are needed to bring us back to normal. In the average person pride has not reached such a degree that extraordinary medicine is needed. The jolts and bumps of everyday life impede lengthy escape from reality. We are not so indifferent to the opinions of our fellow men that we can ignore the possibility that their criticisms may be right. We are perceptive enough to be aware of our dependence on others at almost every stage of our existence. Unfortunately, we do not make sufficient use of this humiliating and realistic information. We fail to devote sufficient time to meditating on our own dependencies and our own proper place in the universe. We do not achieve that kind of humility which would give us a deep insight into reality and bring with it a wisdom and a peace reserved for the saints.

A man steeped in pride, however, needs far more than the rough treatment of everyday life to be shaken out of his fantasy. Only a truly shattering experience can destroy his illusions. An overpowering sorrow, a great physical suffering, a tragic failure, a love which has conquered him before he can steel his heart against it - only these soul-rending human emotions can knock the proud man off the pedestal on which he has placed himself.

We see, then, the point behind the Lenten penances on which the Church insists. They are a mild form of bodily suffering intended to recall to us our creaturehood, a moderate version of the shattering awakening Father Adam received when God summarily ejected him from his dream world, the Garden of Eden, into the harsh world outside.

Sloth

- by *Monsignor Edward V Dailey*

Sloth, although last in our treatment of the seven deadly sins, is not the least. It is probably more deadly than the others because it provides easy ground for the indifferent to lie back and doze away while the devil maneuvers about seeking a juicy soul to devour.



God's threat in the Apocalypse against the people of Laodicea mentions lukewarmness as a particular object of His rejection. The Laodiceans were "neither hot nor cold." Apparently the Apostles had a hard time denting the surface of their indifference. The modern pastor finds a startling percentage of his own people in the same predicament. They just cannot get themselves to church on Sunday. They will send their children oftentimes with a weekly envelope in support of the church they know they should attend. But they are too lukewarm to make the effort of going themselves. Too often their energies have been diluted by staying up most of Saturday night with a martini in hand and a half-hearted resolution to try to make Mass one of these days. So, step by step their religious life begins to founder completely in the lukewarm waters of no resolve.

The omnipotent God is frustrated by the slothful because He does not choose to force the free will of man. He gives him abundant graces; He conspires to land him in His net of mercy. But He will not force love, because the end result would be something else than love.

We can imagine the sorrow in Christ's heart when His beneficence, His compassionate understanding. His gifts of grace are spurned by the person who has sunk in that inordinate love of ease and rest which is the hallmark of the slothful. He is just too downright lazy to turn to God.

Christ can work with the sinner who is tossed about in the waves of temptation but frantically reaches for rescue. But the indifferent man is snoring away the time which can mean his salvation.

He may be convinced that he is doing nothing wrong. "I haven't robbed anyone, I haven't sinned against purity, I haven't slandered anyone, I haven't turned my back on God."

But he has turned his back on God by his sluggish, negative spiritual prostration. He will suddenly find himself overwhelmed by torpidity, cowardice, bitterness at those who speed by in search of grace. He is overwhelmed by despair because he lacks the strength to crash into difficulties with a stout heart, by resentment of his neighbors who are getting up early to go to the parish church to receive the positive guarantees of their salvation in the Blessed Eucharist.

This last neglect is perhaps the gravest omission of all. The slothful one is not getting the lifeblood of his soul because he is just too downright lazy to drag himself out of bed for the Eucharistic banquet which is set for him on every altar in the world. He would not think of skipping ham and eggs, steaks, double martinis, his daily vitamin pill which promises him bodily balance.

But the food of the Eucharist leaves him cold, because he doesn't get spiritual hunger pains except in adversity. He

doesn't see his soul withering away for lack of nutriment or his spirit rattling about like a skeleton in his closet of neglect.

Unfortunately, the ever-present body, with its tendency to pamper itself with every possible comfort, has dimmed the concept of why we were all created. We were born, of course, to know, love and serve God in this life and be happy with Him in the next. The first step in knowing God is to recognize the principle that anything that distracts the creature, man, from his final destiny is to be rejected. Wealth, power, beauty, health are desirable only if they serve as stepping stones toward eternity. If they become the objective of all living, they are snares and delusions. Saint Ignatius turned from the worldly life of a soldier to profound sanctity by looking with shattering honesty at the axiom: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his soul?"

The pity is that slothful people do not summon up enough energy to open their eyes and face the most fundamental fact of life. We are here to love and serve God, and service cannot, in the wildest flight of imagination, be just in lying on our backs beneath a tree waiting for a golden apple to fall in our laps.

There is hope, of course, for the slothful, as there is hope for the wild, disorganized sinner who gallops about in search of illicit pleasure. Both could use a little of each other's spirit. Both could meditate on the use and misuse of time. Both could start to meditate in the shadows of approaching "night when no one can work." The slothful could get up by God's grace and strike off in the direction of God; the sinner could slow down to a walk and allow himself to bask in the sunshine of a clean decision.

One thing is certain. We'll always be pulling ourselves out of the quicksand of capital sins. Whether we sink or not depends upon our willingness to reach for the hand of Christ and let Him lead the way.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Duties to Myself

1) Does my concern for what others think and say of me lead me to go along with the crowd even when my conscience tells me not to?

2) Have I sinned by eating too much? Drinking too much?

3) Do I accept and correct my mistakes, or try spread the blame to others?

4) Have I avoided occasions of sin in my reading, conversations, friendships?

5) Have I cheated at school? At work? Have I cheated my customers?

6) Can I honestly say I am not attached to any sin?



Duties to Others

7) When someone offends me, do I seek revenge? Give way to hatred?

8) Have I injured another's reputation by telling the truth about him without good reason? By lying about him? By innuendo?

9) Do I mock others? Belittle their efforts to do good?

10) Am I given to sulking when others do not follow my plans or suggestions?

11) Have I led my husband, wife, children or anyone else into sin, or into the occasion of sin?

12) Have I been harsh with my children? Too permissive rather than willing to spend the time and energy necessary to teach them virtue and keep them from sin?

13) Have I been respectful, obedient to my parents, teachers and others in authority?

14) Have I often been disagreeable or discourteous at home, work or school?

Duties to God

15) Do I remember to thank God for success when it comes, and to accept failures without bitterness?

16) Have I been guilty of lying for any reason?

17) Have I been late for Mass? Missed it completely without reason?

18) Do I often neglect my prayers through laziness or because I have something else I "have" to do?

19) Do I waste much time doing nothing?

20) When I have felt the urge to perform some good act, have I neglected this grace?

21) Have my words, actions, way of living made anyone think less of the Church?

About This EBook

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